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## Chapter 1 by Jaime Reuter

Bumblefuck, New Jersey. Just far enough from NYC to not be urban and not close enough to farmland to be rural. Northeastern suburbia hell. Mom and Pop diners on every corner, high school football games each Friday night. Nothing at all to do but vandalize shit and walk your dog (which is basically also vandalizing shit because the people on my block think if they pick up their dog's crap the world will explode). Middle-aged people here are stuck up and teenagers are assholes and old people think they're better than everyone and kids are spoiled. And then there's me.

I was born into a family way too late. I could've been a surprise but I think of myself more like an inconvenience. My two brothers, Dylan and Gavin were already driving by the time I was six. Dylan graduated law school recently. He's out in California making more money than I could count but he still sends cool birthday gifts. Gavin's a teacher living a couple miles from the house. I've got a niece or nephew on the way, too. I think Gavin and his wife are going to be cool parents.

Mom's all over the place with Gavin having a baby on the way. As long as I can remember mom's always been busy. She likes to be cleaning and cooking and taking care of kids. I'm at least 73% sure she thinks I'm eight. And then there's dad who doesn't like to be in the house at all. He likes K Mart and buying hunting stuff and drinking beer (or at least pretending to).

I walk through the hall on my least favorite day of the week. No one looks up or talks to me. I've become quite accustomed to being all alone. I'm thinking about what might be on T.V. tonight. I

look up and catch Joan David's eye. We swam together since middle school. I quit this year. She kind of smiles for a second and I see the corner of her mouth. She looks away briskly.

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Now there is no one in this school who doesn't hate, fear, or pity me. I can't decide which is the worst.

I want to scream "It's been three fucking months can someone look me in the eyes already!" but it hasn't been three months. It's been two months, three weeks and six days. The silence in the halls remains silence.

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